



Ransom, Revenge, and Heroic Identity in the Iliad, by Donna F. Wilson. Cambridge University Press, 2002. ISBN 0-521-80660-7. Pp 248.

Pura Nieto
Brown University
puranieto@netscape.net

Donna Wilson's stimulating book takes as its starting point the difficulties that book 9 of the *Iliad* poses to modern scholars. Although Achilles rejects the embassy and announces his immediate departure from Troy, the next day we find him still there, claiming that he is "awaiting supplication, gifts, and the return of Briseis and, further, that he would have already returned to the fighting had Agamemnon treated him kindly (11.609-10; 16.84-86 and 16.69-73)" (p. 2).

Wilson (pp. 2-4) shows the shortcomings of previous interpretations of book 9. But, most of all, she reacts against psychological or moralizing readings of the episode, according to which Achilles rejects Agamemnon's offer of material compensation because he is sponsoring a new conception of honor and has detached himself from the materialistic values of his society, represented by Agamemnon. According to Wilson, book 9 becomes, on this kind of reading, the greatest innovation of the *Iliad*, "in that it transforms a traditional hero into a nontraditional one, a traditional poet into a singular innovator who transcends poetic tradition, and a traditional poem into literature" (p. 4).

But before coming to any conclusions about the heroic identity of Achilles, Wilson argues, it is necessary to find a satisfactory answer to the question: What exactly is Agamemnon offering in the embassy? What is Achilles rejecting? The first task, then, that Wilson sets for herself is to examine the vocabulary used to describe the goods that Agamemnon offers Achilles in exchange for his return to battle. And we

face here the first problem of interpretation, because those goods are characterized diversely as *apoina* (by Agamemnon, 9.120), as *dôra* (by Odysseus, 9.261, and Phoenix, 9.515), and even as *poinê* (although this obliquely, by Aias, 9.633 and 636). Were we to conclude that these words are interchangeable in Homeric parlance, we could also agree that Agamemnon has offered compensation to Achilles. But, of course, they are not. Wilson reflects on the fact that it is precisely this lack of regard for the nuances of the Homeric vocabulary of compensation that undermines the value of previous explanations that have been given for Achilles' rejection of Agamemnon's offer.

On the other hand, if these three words do not bear the same meaning, then the embassy is manipulating the symbolic function of Agamemnon's goods by giving them shifting definitions. And the problem of book 9 is not why Achilles refuses compensation, but rather "what Agamemnon, the embassy, and Achilleus mean by the words they use and what the stakes in this tournament of definitions are" (p. 7).

The goal of the book is, then, to advance the discussion of compensation and heroic identity in Homer's *Iliad*.¹ Wilson's approach to these questions is interdisciplinary, in the line of what is commonly referred to as "cultural poetics." Her method is based on a combination of philology, narratology, anthropology, and oral theory (p. 6).

The book is divided into six chapters, with an introduction and two appendixes. The introduction is effective in presenting the purpose of the book, its contents, and the methodology employed: the narrative of loss and compensation involving Achilles, what Wilson calls the 'monumental compensation theme,' is examined against the background of discrete scenes "that depict unproblematic exchanges of compensation" (p. 8).

Chapter 1 offers a detailed formal analysis of these discrete scenes and shows how compensation functions. Chapters 2 to 5 study

¹ Wilson is careful to let the reader know that this study is not about compensation in Archaic Greek poetry, or in Archaic Greek society in general: "the *Iliad* develops the theme to such an extent, and in such a way, that it does not simply reflect historical practice." (p. 8). Her search is, then, limited to the *Iliad*, although narrative, poetic, and legal traditions from the ancient Mediterranean are used occasionally "as comparanda, and Archaic Greek poetic traditions and cultural history as intertexts." (p. 8).

the 'monumental compensation theme' against this background. Chapter 6 dwells on the cultural framework in which the thematics of compensation in the *Iliad* operates. There are also two very useful Appendixes: 1 presents a complete catalog of all passages involving compensation in the *Iliad*, and 2 offers a quick overview of their main formal elements. Notes, bibliographical references, and indexes follow.

The study of the discrete 'compensation themes' in chapter 1 shows that compensation is a coherent system, thematically and semantically unified. Compensation, unlike exchanges conceived of as purchase or sale, entails *timê*, 'honor', and therefore affects the relative status of the person involved (p. 14). Compensation exchanges may be subsumed under the principle of reciprocity: "the recipient of benefit or harm reciprocates by paying back benefit or harm, ideally in equal measure" (p. 13).²

In spite of this definition, Wilson limits her study of compensation to negative reciprocity: that is, when what is reciprocated is harm. Therefore the study is narrowed down to what we could translate (and Wilson does) as 'ransom' and 'revenge' (p. 14). These English words, though, do not appropriately translate their Greek equivalents: *apoina*, *poinê*. Wilson makes it clear that 'ransom' will be used only in the Homeric sense of "redemption of family members or possessions, and not for the blood price paid by a homicide." The same goes for 'revenge': "taking satisfaction for a loss, whether in the form of retaliation or reparation" (p. 14).

Using the oralist methodology, she identifies an underlying and repeated pattern in each instantiation of compensation in the *Iliad*. The formal elements that make up the compensation theme in the *Iliad* are "loss, a potential exchange, and resolution" (p. 15).

The first element of a compensation theme is harm, which Wilson identifies with loss.³ Although she rightly notes that not all instances of harm produce a reciprocal exchange, still, if the injured

² In the negative case, the harm involves loss of honor, in the positive compensation, increase of honor.

³ Cf. p. 16: "The first element of a compensation theme is harm: one party takes something valuable away from another, creating a condition of loss for the injured party." The whole subject of loss-harm should have been more nuanced: some kinds of harm may produce loss of status, others may not have that consequence. Some harm may involve material loss, other times not.

party or someone on his or her behalf attempts to recover what has been lost, it leads to a compensation theme.

The second element is the “potential exchange by which the loss may be recovered to the satisfaction of one or both parties. The exchange is qualified by direction, path, and sphere.” (p. 16). In a situation of loss with attempted exchange, compensation may travel in one of two directions. First, the injured person, or his family or friends, may take compensation from the first offender or from his family or friends. This is the direction normally referred to as *poinê* (or by the verbs *apotinemen*, *apotinusthai*, ‘pay back’, ‘get oneself paid back’). In this first type, the payment compensates the injured party for the loss and thus reverses the status disequilibrium. In the second type, however, the injured party gives material goods to the offender to secure the return of what was lost (p. 16); thus, compensation preserves the disequilibrium produced by the loss, although it involves also the recovery of the loss. This direction is regularly indicated by the terms *apoina*, or the verb *apoluein*. Although not every instance of this type of exchange is explicitly called *poinê* or *apoina*, the two terms, Wilson affirms, do regularly designate direction, and so she classifies all the examples into one or the other of these two patterns (*apoina*, *poinê*).

Several scenes, which Wilson labels ‘mixed type,’ show the competition that exists to determine the direction of the exchange: whether it will be *apoina* or *poinê*. Wilson concludes (p. 17) that this type of scene shows clearly that *apoina* and *poinê* are mutually exclusive.

The term ‘path’ “is used to compare the objects of exchange themselves; it deals with exchangeability” (p. 17). But the system used to establish this is more symbolic than economic; and the heuristic device used to examine the exchangeability of objects is called ‘spheres’ (p.18). An exchange of goods that belong to the same sphere (‘conveyance’) is normally unproblematic, but an exchange of goods that do not belong to the same sphere (‘conversion’) is. Wilson has sensible observations concerning the categorization of goods, particularly of persons and, above all, of women.⁴

⁴ Women may be regarded as persons by their families, but as prestige goods by others if they have been enslaved; so too ‘cultural wealth,’ such as might in battle, skill in performative speech, the attributes of a priest, etc.

This first chapter offers, then, a good overview of the language (that is, the vocabulary and its semantics) employed in compensation themes in the *Iliad*. Wilson indicates the verbal repetitions that are to be found in themes of the *apoina* type and in the *poinë* type. As for *poinë*, it can adopt two forms: ‘composition’ (settlement in goods) or *tisis* (payment exacted in harm).

Wilson (p. 35) aptly remarks that *philoï* can exact *poinë* for each other, or can offer *apoina* on behalf of each other, and exchange both ‘composition’ and *tisis* among themselves. But they do not exchange *apoina* among themselves: they do not seize and hold for ransom each other’s possessions. In fact, only the Trojans are shown offering *apoina* in the *Iliad*. The Greeks, maybe because they were far from their parents and families, did not have that possibility. All this, of course, makes Agamemnon’s behavior towards Achilles the more exceptional: he is the only one to offer *apoina* to a *philos*.

Although throughout this chapter Wilson makes some very good points in analyzing the vocabulary of compensation, she also advances certain propositions that in the view of this reviewer are, if not entirely wrong, at least problematic.

For example, when examining the role of supplication in compensation themes, Wilson concludes that “Compensation is associated with supplication only in those scenes in which a defeated warrior offers *apoina* on the battlefield, usually on behalf of his father,” and that supplication is not “mentioned in association with fathers bringing *apoina* to the Greek camp” (p. 29). Wilson considers that the case of Chryses’ bringing *apoina* in book 1 does not involve supplication.⁵ But, even if Chryses’ supplication is not fully described it is plausibly a supplication. Thus, it would contradict her claim.⁶ We also read that “Compensation in Homeric society is ‘between men’”⁷...

⁵ Cf. p. 42: “Although Chryses is said to plead with the Achaians (*lissesthai*, 1.15), a verb that appears elsewhere as one of several indices of supplication, he does not adopt the language or the physical gestures of a suppliant.”

⁶ For a good analysis of the anomalies in Chryses’ plea to the Achaeans, see M. Clark, “Chryses’ Supplication: Speech Act and Mythological Allusion,” *ClAnt* 17 (1998) 5-24; she nevertheless considers the passage to involve supplication.

⁷ “Females who enter this male domain are inevitably shown as introducing disorder and danger by their very presence.” She cites the

But, what then, one might ask, about Thetis' supplication to Zeus, in a compensation theme –the monumental one no less-, requesting *poinê* for Achilles? Wilson does not even consider this passage as a compensation theme, although she includes others where, like here, there is no specific mention of *apoina* or *poinê*. Thetis, though, is clearly requesting from Zeus compensatory *timê* for Achilles, with punishment (harm) for the Achaeans.⁸

Equally, on p. 30 we read that Priam's supplication to Achilles is a "spectacular reversal" of the normal pattern: child supplicates, father brings *apoina*. Well, it isn't. What the scene shows is the realization of what has been presented in all other cases either as future possibilities or events of the past: "my father *will bring* you *apoina*," "my father brought you *apoina*." In this case, the focus is, for once, on the situation in the present: the father, in fact, is bringing *apoina*. That the son makes a supplication on the battlefield does not preclude a further supplication from the father when he actually brings the *apoina*, which is exactly what happens in the Priam-Achilles exchange. There is another substantial difference between this case and the others mentioned. We are not dealing with the ransom for a live child (as in the other examples): Priam is ransoming only the dead body, the corpse of Hector.

Wilson notes that offers of *apoina* made before the arrival of Chryses to the Greek camp in book 1 were accepted, and they will—presumably—be accepted again after Priam's visit to Achilles in

cases of Hera, 4.24-56, and Hecabe, 24.200-16, but dismisses them saying that their intervention is indirect, the political benefit they get for their cities is negligible, and the consequences for their cities or families are disastrous.

⁸ Cf. 1.508-10. Although Thetis' petition is mainly for Achilles, she is also demanding compensatory *timê* for herself. She has already lost *timê* by her marriage to Peleus, and now, again, with Achilles' situation. When Zeus takes some time before giving her a positive answer, Thetis complains: νημερτῆς μὲν δὴ μοι ὑπόσχεο καὶ κατάνευσον, / ἢ ἀπόειπ', ἐπεὶ οὐ τοι ἔπι δέος, ὄφρ' εὐ εἰδῶ / ὅσσον ἐγὼ μετὰ πᾶσιν ἀτιμοτάτη θεὸς εἰμι. (1.514-16). "Bend your head and promise me to accomplish this thing, or else refuse it, you have nothing to fear, that I may know by how much I am the most dishonoured of all gods" (Lattimore's translation).

book 24.⁹ But those that take place between those two events are rejected. From this, she concludes: “Therefore the only explanation that accounts for all successes and failures of *apoina* is the temporal one.” (p. 31). It is true that *apoina*-type exchanges fail throughout the *Iliad* until book 24, but timing cannot be and is not the *explanation* for the failure of *apoina*. The explanation for this failure is rather that Agamemnon’s behavior has opened up a crisis that disrupts the ‘regular,’ ‘normal,’ course of the war. The breach of Achaean leadership impedes the normal development of things.

Concerning the monumental theme of compensation (that is, Achilles’ wrath and its consequences) that occupies the main body of the book, Wilson reaches several conclusions:

1. The quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles is the result of the clash in Homeric society between two different ideological models for leadership: “a zero-sum fluid model based on *timê* in which a social hierarchy, hence a best (*aristos*) is negotiated through ritualized conflict, and a fixed-rank model in which the best is politically authenticated and maintains his power in part through redistribution of spoils.”

Homer, then, explores Achilles’ wrath as a reaction to the perceived manipulation and abuse of a social system, and not as an existential or ethical phenomenon. Achilles is not rejecting the materialistic values of his society and presenting a new, more spiritual, model of the individual. Neither is he contesting the material basis of *timê*.¹⁰ For Wilson, what Achilles contests is the “collective belief that legitimates Agamemnon’s cultural wealth as insuperable and the political system it represents as preemptive” (p. 20; see also p. 58).

⁹ It is true that some cases of acceptance of *apoina* before the narrative time of the *Iliad* are mentioned in the poem, but we do not know to what extent they were or not accepted. We have, for example, the case of Achilles’ incursion in Thebes, the city of Andromache’s family (6.424-428). We are told that Achilles killed her father and brothers, but accepted *apoina* for Andromache’s mother, whom he had taken captive. We have every reason to assume they made offers of *apoina*, but, obviously, they were not accepted.

¹⁰ Wilson acknowledges that “*Timê* comprises a material element and an abstract, immaterial element, namely, honor or status” (p.18), but she argues with W. Donlan that, in a symbolic system of exchange, *timê* as status is indistinguishable from its material signs.

2. Within the system of compensation that seems to operate in Homer, *apoina* and *poinë* are mutually exclusive alternatives for the resolution of a conflict. “Only Achilles,” Wilson writes, “exploits the possibility of taking both *poinë* and *apoina* or gifts (*dôra*), first in the embassy scene, which unfolds as an expanded mixed-type theme, and again when he accepts Priam’s *apoina* for Hektor’s corpse.” (p. 17).

The first of these conclusions seems questionable. During his quarrel with Agamemnon, Achilles never challenges the system as such, but he surely criticizes bitterly Agamemnon’s role as a leader. It is not the system that is wrong: the problem is that Agamemnon is a bad leader.¹¹ And this is clearly an ethical issue. Should Achilles cross his arms, like the other Achaeans, and simply watch the people dying from the plague sent by Apollo, or should he try to do something? Doesn’t he feel, from his superior position as the best warrior, a stronger sense of responsibility toward the army? It surely is not a comfortable position, but it falls to him to face the problem and *try to find a solution*. By the way, he is not the only one among the Achaeans who finds Agamemnon’s leadership problematic. Odysseus has two rather tense confrontations with him too.

Wilson affirms (p. 59) that, in the view of Achilles, “Agamemnon has performed his office as distributor of goods and honors (*timai*) unjustly and has in fact made winning *timê* at Troy impossible. There is, therefore, no reason to stay.” But Achilles’ motivation to go home is not that Agamemnon has made it impossible to win *timê* at Troy; it is rather that Agamemnon *has already diminished* Achilles’ *timê*, by taking Briseis away from him, and by insulting him in front of the whole army. In addition, Agamemnon has reenacted in respect to Achilles Paris’ behavior toward Menelaus.¹² If, following Wilson, *philoï* do not exchange *apoina*, because *philoï* do not take each other’s possessions, Agamemnon has already violated the rules of the system, and clearly so, by taking Achilles’ prize. In response to this slight,¹³ Achilles moves in the only direction that would make sense for

¹¹ We may also note, incidentally, that if Achilles were criticizing the system as such, he would also be the embodiment of a new type of hero: the revolutionary.

¹² Wilson, p. 47, acknowledges that this “undermines the *moral* basis for the war.” (My highlighting, PN).

¹³ It is unfortunate that, although Wilson announces in her introduction (p. 5): “As important, one must also know what a slight is and whether

him: he tries to get *poinë* (not *apoina*) from Agamemnon, he tries to punish him. The best way to do this is precisely to expose Agamemnon once more as a disastrous leader: the *poimên laôn* par excellence, whose wrong judgment is bringing the Achaeans only death and defeat.

Wilson (pp. 48-51) explains well how Agamemnon has lost *timê* with his behavior toward Chryses, and then toward Achilles. When he is forced to return Chryseis to her father, Agamemnon tries to assimilate her to his wife, Clytemnestra, thereby making his own position similar to that of Menelaus or Chryses. In these circumstances, he tries to build a *poinë* theme for himself. On p. 51 Wilson reproduces a schematic representation of Agamemnon's *poinë* theme, similar to previous ones illustrating Chryses' or Achilles'. The problem, Wilson says, is that Agamemnon is not capable of building his *poinë* theme correctly. He ends up with there being two empty positions in the schema. It is not clear who is to be blamed for the damage Agamemnon is suffering, or who is the superior agency, able to help him to get his *poinë* (that is, the position occupied by Apollo in the *poinë* theme of Chryses). Wilson tentatively proposes Achilles or Apollo for the first position, but leaves out Chalcas and Chryses who are, with Apollo, the real orchestrators of Agamemnon's loss. It is true that Achilles also cooperates, but he is neither the originator of the problem, nor the agent who solves it.¹⁴ Therefore, the schema Wilson offers here seems insufficient. Wilson leaves the position of the superior agency open (with question marks). But, we could ask, who is that superior agency that can help Agamemnon? The hero himself names him explicitly at 1. 175: the one that gives him *timê*: Zeus. On p. 58 Wilson writes: "Achilleus and Agamemnon, it seems, both want to occupy the same role ..., a role each would identify as belonging for different reasons to the best of the Achaians." What Wilson does not affirm explicitly here (but see more on the issue on pp. 102-3) is that the rivalry between Achilles and Agamemnon, from their quarrel in book 1 on, is a competition for the *timê* that Zeus gives, which will ratify that position of 'the best of the

domination is an expected social goal," she does not follow up on this point. No mention of 'slight' is to be found in the index, and certainly there is no detailed study of the issue in the book.

¹⁴ Given that Agamemnon, Wilson explains, cannot get *poinë* from Apollo, he turns to Achilles as second best.

Achaeans.’¹⁵ Achilles makes it clear during his conversation with his mother that Zeus owes him *timê* (1. 353) and expresses at 9.608 the conviction that Zeus is already giving it to him. Material possessions count for Achilles and for Agamemnon, but their struggle is not over material possessions, but over the positions they occupy within their community; it is a struggle for power in which both seek Zeus’ ratification. Otherwise, Agamemnon would have made an apology to Achilles together with the gifts in the Embassy, Achilles would have accepted it, and we would have no *Iliad*.¹⁶

But when he receives the embassy, Achilles seems to be more interested in sheer *poinë* than gifts. What he wants (and says it quite clearly) is to punish Agamemnon, to humiliate him, to make him suffer. That, in Wilson’s terminology, is clearly *poinë*, not *apoina*. It does not solve the question (although Wilson, pp. 60-61, tries this route) to invoke here Athena’s intervention in book 1 (105-124) to prevent Achilles from killing Agamemnon on the spot. Wilson argues that Achilles, in obeying the goddess, is accepting the ‘great gifts’ that will follow and that, by the simple fact of waiting, he is entering into a strategy of *mêtis* (Wilson, even compares it to Odysseus’s style in the *Odyssey*). This, I must say, seems to me farfetched. Although patience and waiting are necessary conditions for *mêtis*, they are not sufficient conditions for it. *Mêtis* also requires something else, something important: careful devising and planning. Achilles is a rather impulsive hero (‘the swift one’), not the patient Odysseus. He seems to react rather on the spur of the moment, and does not have any ‘plan.’ That explains why he says in book 9 that he will depart Troy the following morning, but he finally stays on the battlefield. That is also why he almost kills Agamemnon in book 1 or

¹⁵ Wilson (pp. 66-67), is right in following L. Slatkin, who sees in Achilles’ complaints to his mother about the shortness of his own life an evocation of the myth behind Achilles’ birth: Thetis could give Zeus a child that would take sovereignty away from him. From this, Wilson (p. 67) concludes: “underlying Achilleus’ appeal is a perception of his mortality as gratuitous harm for which Zeus owes him *poinë*, that is, compensatory *timê*.”

¹⁶ In addition, as Wilson aptly notes, Agamemnon in sending *apoina* is not recognizing his error: a formal apology was also in order, but Agamemnon does not offer one. And by characterizing the gifts as *apoina*, he is further humiliating Achilles (although the emissaries do not use this word).

why he decides to go back to the fighting immediately upon hearing of Patroclus' death, suddenly forgetting the whole issue with Agamemnon.

Finally, the situations of the two heroes differ on another count: for Odysseus it is a case of all-or-nothing, of saving or losing his life, whereas for Achilles the question is simply to get either immediate *tisis* or a delayed *poinë*. Although both Odysseus and Achilles have to wait, and do not get immediate gratification, their strategies are very different. Odysseus follows a *mêtis* strategy, whereas Achilles exerts violence (passive, not active violence), and his strategy is one of *biê* (*pace* Wilson) and not of *mêtis*.¹⁷

In addition to this, the problem of book 9 cannot be reduced to a battle of words, as Wilson has it. I agree that there is a clear manipulation of language in this episode,¹⁸ but that is not the only or the main problem it poses. At least equally important is that the characters involved say that they will do one thing, and then do something else. Achilles stays at Troy instead of going back to Phthia, Odysseus does not report with fidelity Achilles' words, etc.

Equally off the mark, I think, is her second conclusion, that Achilles is the only one to *exploit* the possibility of getting *poinë* and *apoina* at the same time, at least in this formulation. Even if up to the arrival of the embassy, Achilles has been thinking of the gifts promised by Athena, it is clear that at the moment of the embassy itself he is not thinking of them. Phoenix warns him that he may end up losing both honor and gifts, like Meleager, but to no effect. In his last words, to Aias, Achilles makes the point clear that he wants *poinë* only. What he wants is that Agamemnon know the suffering he, Achilles, is going through. But that, obviously, is an impossibility. Wilson thinks that at

¹⁷ This comparison with Odysseus' *mêtis*, in fact, seems to obscure rather than illuminate Achilles' ways. Achilles' refusal to continue to perform as is expected of him is better compared to Demeter's, in the *Homeric Hymn* dedicated to her. After losing her daughter, the goddess refuses to continue with her regular functions, thereby organizing a general catastrophe that inflicts punishment not only on Zeus, but on all gods and humans. This passive violence attitude finally forces a solution to her problem. In the same manner, Achilles' retreat from battle produces very negative effects on the troops, not only on Agamemnon as a ruler.

¹⁸ For example, Odysseus changes Agamemnon's message to Achilles, and also omits crucial points when he reports back to the Achaeans Achilles' reply.

this point Achilles is gaining time to obtain *tisis* first, and then gifts (see p. 103). The first part of this statement is quite true, but I found the second part less convincing. What seems to dominate his position now is that in Agamemnon's offense against him there is a question of outrage or insult. When this is the case, the usual strategy is one of *tisis*, vengeance, not one of composition. It is important to bear in mind that Athena, in her intervention in book 1 (at 214) qualifies Agamemnon's behavior toward Achilles as *hybris*, and that Achilles calls it *lôbê* at 9.387. I also agree that the way Agamemnon has conducted the embassy is just another strategy to cast Achilles in a dependent position in regard to himself. This, of course does not produce the effect that Agamemnon intended, but rather infuriates Achilles further. Wilson seems to underplay in her interpretation the extent to which Achilles' mind is totally taken up with rage, the extremity of his anger. Not even the thought of his father Peleus and the advice he gave him before the war, or the old ties to his fellow-warriors, can distract him from the fury he feels towards Agamemnon for the humiliating way in which the leader treated him. As he himself says in his short reply to Aias: "every time I remember what he did to me..."¹⁹ He also makes, at this moment, the important point that he would only go back to fighting if fire reaches his own ship. Wilson (p. 107) does not elaborate on this point. But the fact is that from now on, Achilles puts himself completely out of the community of the Achaeans, and, in my opinion, he will not be truly reintegrated in it in the poem. If up to this point there was still some hope left that he had not totally broken his ties to the Achaean community, now we know that is not the case. From now on Achilles only has personal interests.

In the case of the ransom of Hector's body, a similar thing happens. By the time he kills Hector, Achilles is not thinking of material gifts anymore: he wants simply to do Hector as much harm as Hector has done him (again, an impossibility). In addition, as he kills Hector he is ending his own life, and he knows it: he will die soon after Hector. His desire for *poinë* to avenge Patroclus's death is unstoppable: no composition is possible now: only revenge. He is aware that he will lose his life with this revenge, but he does not care anymore. If he does not care even about his own life, would he care about gifts? By the time he

¹⁹ Cf. 9.646-8: ἀλλὰ μοι οἰδάνεται κραδίη χόλω, ὀππότε κείνων / μνήσομαι, ὡς μ' ἀσύφηλον ἐν Ἀργείοισιν ἔρεξεν / Ἀτρείδης, ὧς εἴ τιν' ἀτίμητον μετανάστην.

receives Priam and his *apoina*, Achilles is as good as dead himself (as C. Whitman showed). The *apoina* that Priam brings to Achilles have to do more with Priam himself and with the conventions he has to follow than with Achilles: that is what you do when trying to recover a person, dead or alive. The old king of Troy, therefore, cannot just go to Achilles empty-handed. Achilles' desire for vengeance after the death of Patroclus is so great that he not only has killed Hector, but keeps mistreating the body to a point that constitutes defiance of the gods.

Even if in his quarrel with Agamemnon Achilles was thinking of getting both *poinê* and *apoina* (which I think is, at least, doubtful), in his killing of Hector there is no consideration of possible *apoina* at all. It is true that Achilles ends up getting *apoina* and *poinê* in both cases, but he does not *exploit* that possibility consciously. A very strong divine intervention is needed to force Achilles to return the body, and even so, the hero feels he must apologize to his dead friend Patroclus for the offense. In addition, as many readers have noticed, Achilles' encounter with Priam reverses the behavior of Agamemnon with Chryses in book 1: an old, but culturally important, man faces a young one, also prominent, with a question of ransom. In his encounter with the old man Achilles comes out 'better' than Agamemnon, as a man who is able to overcome his personal pain and show respect for a person whom Homeric society establishes as deserving proper treatment.

We may then ask ourselves: isn't Achilles here distancing himself from the model of Agamemnon? Is the *Iliad*, then, at the very end, suggesting that Achilles is showing himself a better leader than the son of Atreus? Isn't the *Iliad*, among many other things, also an examination of two possible models of rulership? And what conclusion, if any, is to be extracted from this? Who is the good leader? Wilson's answer goes as follows: "By... casting Achilleus successfully in his thematic role in the final scene, the poem betrays a decided preference for Achilleus as a leader and for the agonistic system through which he emerged, naturally, as best" (p. 142). As I see it, though, what the poem shows is Achilles as a better individual than Agamemnon. Achilles, by the end of the *Iliad*, has not been reintegrated into the community, the system, or anything else. He had begun an individual trip since the quarrel in book 1, and, since the death of Patroclus, he has continued that way. When he returns to battle, it is not to defend the Achaeans, not to help his friends and serve his community: it is only to satisfy his personal revenge and to appease the pain at the loss of his companion. We should not forget the circumstances in which his encounter with Priam takes

place: at night and secretly. Achilles is hiding his dealings with Priam from the rest of the Achaeans, and, based only on his personal authority, he agrees to a truce with the Trojans. Is all this proof that Achilles is reintegrated into his community, or rather that he continues to operate on the margins of it?

In conclusion, I do not think that the poem presents Achilles as the best leader. It seems to me rather that both models are condemned. Both Agamemnon and Achilles, for their own reasons and with their own personal virtues and shortcomings, have shown themselves through the poem as responsible for the death of their people, that is, the opposite of what the ideal ruler should do (namely, to protect their people). Both Agamemnon and Achilles have exceeded the limits assigned by their community to their roles.²⁰ What the *Iliad* shows very clearly is the terrible consequences that the fights for power among the elite have on those of lesser station. In the world of the poem, the heroes pay with their lives for trivial disputes among the gods, and the *laoi* perish when their leaders are unable to resolve their differences in favor of the rest.

The questions posed by this book are all very important, and the solutions advanced, even if they will not satisfy everyone, constitute a welcome contribution to our understanding of the poem.²¹

²⁰ That is, although in different ways, both manifest *hybris*, a notion not even mentioned in this book.

²¹ It is to be regretted that the author does not specify the edition of the text that she uses. The bibliography has Allen's *OCT*, but no more recent editions such as West's or Van Thiel's. Occasionally, though, the text she follows is not Allen's; e.g. on p. 162 Wilson prints in 17. 202: *σχεδόν ἔστι*, the reading of the vulgate, whereas Allen prints Aristarchus' correction *εἶσι*.